

Drowning in Dishes, but Finding a Home

By DANIAL ADKISON OCT. 11, 2014



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The people who make a difference in your life come in all types. Some write on a chalkboard. Some wear a sports uniform. Some wear a suit and tie. For me, that person wore a tie with a Pizza Hut logo on it.

I started working at Pizza Hut in December 1989, when I was a freshman in high school. Parents in my small western Colorado town encouraged teenagers to work in the service industry after school and on weekends. It

kept us out of trouble.

Having a job also kept me out of the house. I grew up mostly with my mother, and I never knew my biological father. My younger sister, younger brother and I went through a series of stepfathers. My relationship with those men was almost always fraught, and I was always looking for reasons to be away from home.

The Pizza Hut was old, and in the back it had three giant sinks instead of a dishwasher. One basin was for soapy water, one for rinsing and the other for sanitizing, using a tablet that made me cough when I dropped it into the hot water. All new employees started by washing dishes and busing tables. If they proved their mettle, they learned to make pizzas, cut and serve them on wooden paddles and take orders.

On my first night, the dishes piled up after the dinner rush: plates, silverware, cups and oily black deep-dish pans, which came clean only with a lot of soap and scrubbing in steaming-hot water. I couldn't keep up, and stacks of dishes formed on all sides of me. Every time I made a dent in the pile, the call came back for help clearing tables out front, and I returned with brown tubs full of more dirty dishes.

At home, the chore I hated most was dishes. A few years earlier, my mother's then boyfriend instilled a loathing of that task by making me scrub the Teflon off a cookie sheet, believing that it was grease, while he sat on the couch and smoked cigarettes. That boyfriend was gone, but another with a different set of problems had taken his place.

My shift was supposed to end at 9 p.m., but when I asked to leave, the manager, Jeff, shook his head. "Not until the work is done," he said. "You leave a clean station." I was angry and thought about quitting, but I scrubbed, rinsed and sanitized until after 10 that night.